

Silence

by Katsu

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# **Quare me repulisti, et  
> quare tristis incedo, dum<br> affligit me inimicus?**  
> <font>(Why hast thou cast me off, and<br> why do I go sorrowful  
whilst  
> the enemy afflicteth me?)<br> (_From traditional Tridentine  
Mass_)
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# Silence

Tifa stared at the ceiling of the room, laying motionless in the bed. It was a warm ceiling, made of wordwork with a finish that almost glowed. It was alive with the light from the room. The entire house felt alive, thrumming with some kind of deep seated energy from foundation to roof. \_What else could you expect from Aeris' house, thoughâ€|\_ Tifa closed her eyes, feeling the familiar prickling of tears. \_Aeris somehow imbued life into everything she touchedâ€|she was so vibrantly alive herselfâ€|\_ With a muffled sound, half moan, Tifa felt tears beginning to slide out from under her eyelids.

Since they had watched Aeris die in the City of the Ancients, she had kept her sadness locked inside, tried to be strong for Cloud and, surprisingly, Cait Sith. Both had been hit hard by the loss, though in different ways. Cait Sith had become depressed and sorrowful. Somehow, though he was only a robot, he gave the impression that he was weeping.

Cloud had retreated completely into a cloak of silence, devoid of any emotion at all. \_Cloudâ€|\_ Tifa sighed softly. He hadn't said a word

since they had left the City of the Ancients, having revisited it on the behest of Bugen Hagen. Having revisited Aeris' death, watching it replayed before themâ€¦ He walked around like a man in a dream, one that he hoped-no-prayed that he would wake from soon, his blue eyes showing the cold numbness he felt inside.

Tifa put one arm over her eyes. \_Cloud, why won't you let me near? I only want to help youâ€¦\_ She gritted her teeth. Every day, Cloud pushed everyone away harder and harder, retreating further into his shell. Finally giving up on the idea of trying to sleep, she stood, scrubbing the tear marks from her cheeks with the palms of her hands. As silently as possible, she opened her door and walked downstairs, carefully avoiding the third step-it squeaked.

Elmyra was sitting at the kitchen table, an old fashioned kerosene lamp burning steadily in front of her. She looked up at Tifa. "Can't sleep?"

Nodding silently, Tifa leaned back against the banister. Elmyra looked back down at the needlepoint she had been doing. Surprisingly, Elmyra had taken the news best of all of them. She'd said that she'd done her weeping a long time ago, when Aeris had first told her what was to happenâ€¦and that Aeris was reunited with the planet that she so lovedâ€¦so how could it be right to cry?

"You aren't the only one." Elmyra stated, pulling a bit of thread through.

"Oh? Who else has been up and about?" Tifa crossed her fingers, hoping that her guess was wrong.

"Cloud wandered down here and out the door nearly an hour ago." Elmyra bit off the thread, tying it into a small knot. "Poor thingâ€¦I think he's just trying to find a base to rebuild everything upon now."

"That doesn't surprise me." Tifa closed her eyes. So much had happened since the City of the Ancientsâ€¦Cloud's breakdown, and fall into the lifestreamâ€¦and later, the return of his memories. His world had been shattered, three times now, though perhaps the additional two blows had only served to break the shards of his life into even smaller pieces. Cloud had tried, she knewâ€¦he had tried to rebuild himself, hold himself together and be a perfect leader, to avenge Aerisâ€¦but something in him had died, something vital. She bit her lip. It hurt her to see him like this, made her heart ache with sympathy, and made her angry because there was nothing she could do to help. The more she tried, the harder Cloud pushed her away, as if even the affection found in friendship burned him.

"I thinkâ€¦" Elmyra threaded her needle, pausing to closely examine the eye of the needle as she slid the thread through, "That Cloud has been struck by so many shocks at one time that he's gone numb and locked all of his feelings inside." She began to poke the thread through the fabric, beginning a new row of color in the needlepoint picture. "Like the other young man with youâ€¦Vincent."

Tifa nodded slowly, apprehension growing in her as she saw the comparison. Elmyra had taken quite a liking to Vincent, treating him just as she treated Cloud, like a son. Vincent, surprisingly, had taken well to her motherly behavior, helping the woman around the

house. A few times, Tifa thought that he was smiling, though he was still as silent and contained as always. The problem was, Tifa didn't want Cloud to become as quiet and reserved as Vincent. At the same time, she could understand how much effort the fragile, emotionless calm was costing him, and she shuddered to imagine what would happen if that calm broke and he emerged from the numbness with his wounds still so fresh. "Do you know where he went?"

"I think he went to visit my daughter's flowers. He needs the comfort, I think." Elmyra glanced at Tifa. "At the moment, I would leave him be, if I were you."

Tifa shrugged. "I don't think I can."

"That's your watch, dear."

Tifa sighed and headed toward the door. "I'm going to go find Cloud now, if anyone asks."

"Be careful." With those last words, Elmyra returned to concentrating on her needlepoint.

After a moment of thinking, Tifa set off, taking the shortest path she remembered to the church. It was as it had always been in her memory; the roof falling apart, the stones cracked, and parts of the stained glass window broken out. Somehow, rather than being dreary, it was alive, far more alive than anything in a city had the right to be.

Feeling a strange reverence that hushed her footsteps, she slipped through the rotting doors of the church.

Cloud knelt on the floor before the altar, in the center of a veritable cascade of flowers. His head was bowed, his blonde hair shining brightly in the light that flooded through the holes in the roof, seemingly from nowhere. For just a moment, Tifa could almost see Aeris in the light, kneeling beside Cloud, amongst the flowers she loved so much. The apparition reached up a hand and tenderly stroked Cloud's hair before Tifa shook her head, making the vision disappear.

Though she hadn't made a noise, Cloud turned to look at her, the glow of his bright blue eyes dampened in the glory of the light that streamed down upon him. "Tifa." He said quietly, his voice completely void of any emotion but an overwhelming note singing with pain and loss.

"Cloudâ€¦Iâ€¦came to take you back."

He turned away, looking up into the light, the corners of his eyes crinkling slightly as he had to squint from the brightness. "I'm not ready to go back yetâ€¦I don't think I ever will be." It was difficult to tell in the incandescent white glow of the light, but Tifa thought he was smiling softly. "When I'm here, I feel as if Aeris is with me. I can find some measure of peace."

Raw harshness sprang up in Tifa's throat. "Cloud, Aeris is dead. You have to move on."

Slowly, he turned his face toward her, the expression on it devoid of

feeling once more. His voice was equally harsh, sounding like broken glass in her ears. "No, Tifa. There is no moving on. Aeris IS dead. Everything stops."

"Nothing stops, Cloud." Tifa took a deep, shaking breath, tiny, hot anger flaring in her stomach. "It's wrong, and it's sad, and it's unjust, but the world doesn't careâ€¦it keeps spinning along through space, time keeps movingâ€¦it doesn't matter to it thatâ€¦on more light has gone out." She finished in a rush, surprised at her own reaction. "The world keeps moving."

"Not for me." He looked down at the flowers. "Aeris saved me, Tifa. She saved me in more ways than just protecting my worthless life with these flowers." He brushed his hand gently over the myriad of petals.

"Don't you see? That's why you have to let her go!" Tifa took a single step forward before stopping, her footstep echoing with obscene volume in the peace of the church. "She saved you, so you owe it to her to keep goingâ€¦she wouldn't want you to just stop like thatâ€¦and damnit Cloud, you owe it to meâ€¦to us! All of us! We followed you through this entire thing. You can't just leave us hanging!"

He didn't bother to look at her. "Leave me alone. I just want a little peace."

Her stomach churning, Tifa turned, pausing at the church doors. "I love you, Cloud."

Silence was her only answer.

\* \* \*

Later, Cloud returned when everyone was awake. He was once again smiling, laughing and joking with Barrett and Cid.

But Tifa shuddered when she looked into his eyes. The pain and numbness was still there, just better hidden by the new mask he had put on.

And when she looked at him, she could still hear the silence.

\* \* \*

\_Author's note: Cloud is my most favorite character next to Reno. Notably, Tifa is my least favorite, as far as the heroes of the story go. I've never been able to visualize Cloud and Tifa being together, let alone being in love, mostly because the main reason I've always heard of why they're meant to be is the fact that they've "been together since they were kids." Now, I like the ideaâ€¦but it doesn't work here, because Tifa and Cloud were not close friends as children. Cloud was a social outcast. Tifa was the societal queen of the children, who snubbed Cloud like the other kids. Cloud lied to himself as far as his past went, because he couldn't face the shame of being rejected from the SOLDIER programâ€¦but Tifa lied to herself as well, by telling herself that she knew and liked Cloud a great deal more than she actually did. Where's the reason for them to get together? They're still on completely different levels, as far as I'm concernedâ€¦and that's why I wrote this.\_

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